HORROR
AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
NO. 39
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10¢
THE VAULT OF HORROR®
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THE CRYPT-KEEPER
THE OLD WITCH
JOHNNY CRAIG

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THE VAULT OF HORROR!®

HEH, HEH! HOW Y'ALL, LI'L OL' HARPIES AND HOBGOBLINS? PAHOON MAH *SOUTHERN-TYPE DROOL*, CHILLUN, BUT IF YOU'LL JUST HUSTLE INTO THE *VAULT OF HORROR* SO'S I CAN CLOSE THE CREAKY DOOR AND KEEP OUT THAT *FILTHY FRESH AIR*, YOUR *VAULT-KEEPER* WILL LEAD YOU ON A TOUR THROUGH SOME STINKING, MIASMIC SWAMPS... THAT IS, IF IT'S ALL RIGHT *BAYOU!* YOU REMEMBER *DRUSILLA*, DON'T YOU? SHE'S MY ONLY COMPANION HERE IN THE *VAULT*... OTHER THAN THE *RATS!* TOGETHER WE *DUG UP* THIS *SORROWFUL SELECTION OF SWAMPLAND SPOONING* CONCERNING A LONELY LAD AND HIS LACHRYMOSE (*LACHRYMOSE?* WHAT *DAT??*) LOVE FOR A LASS. I CALL IT...

DEADLY BELOVED!

IT'S ONE OF THOSE HOT, SULTRY DAYS YOU FIND IN LOUISIANA... STICKY AND OPPRESSIVE. OVERHEAD THE SKY IS BURSTING WITH A BLARING SUN THAT ROASTS MY CAR, AND I'M GRATEFUL FOR SHADED STRETCHES OF TREES, DRAPED HEAVILY WITH SPANISH MOSS...

IN THE SOUTHWEST, BLACK BILLOWING CLOUDS PORTEND A VIOLENT STORM, AND EVEN NOW A FAINT GRUMBLING THREAT COMES FROM THE DISTANT HEAVENS. BUT HERE, ON THIS UNPAVED SWAMPROAD, THE ONLY CLOUDS ARE THE DUST RAISED BY THE JOUNCING OF MY CAR...

SALTY SWEAT TRICKLING FROM MY FOREHEAD STINGS MY EYES, BETRAYING ME TO SUDDEN TREACHEROUS RUTS THAT SLYLY TRY TO GUIDE MY WHEELS INTO THE MURKY SLOUGHS...

BLAST IT! THIS IS WHAT I GET FOR LETTING MY EDITOR TALK ME INTO TAKING THIS ASSIGNMENT!

MY EDITOR HAD BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT MY INCREASING DEPRESSION. HE FELT I NEEDED ADVENTURE, ROMANCE... *LOVE!* SOMETHING WAS *LACKING* IN MY LIFE... I NEEDED *LOVE*, HE SAID, TO SNAP ME BACK TO NORMAL.

LOVE... PHOOEY! THERE'S NO LOVE IN *THIS* CRUMMY WORLD!

MERELY *THINKING* OF MY EDITOR BRINGS MISFORTUNE. HAD MY MIND BEEN ON MY DRIVING, I'D HAVE REALIZED THAT THE CAR WAS OVERHEATING DANGEROUSLY. I SUDDENLY HEAR THE UNMISTAKABLE SOUND OF THE RADIATOR BOILING OVER, AND I BRING THE CAR TO A HALT AND GET OUT...

HMPF! MISERABLE LUCK! AS IF THINGS WEREN'T BAD ENOUGH!

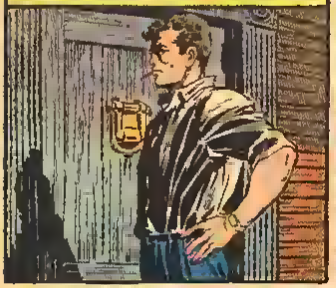
STRANGE HOW A MAN WILL CLING TO A LIFE HE'S TIRED OF LIVING! WHAT UNSEEN FORCE IS IT THAT DRIVES A MAN ON TO MEET HIS DESTINY? I LINGER ON THIS THOUGHT BUT A MOMENT, THEN RETURN MY ATTENTION TO THE SAD-LOOKING CAR...

..NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT.. GOTTA JUST LET IT SIMMER DOWN FOR A WHILE! BETTER FIND A SPOT OF SHADE WHILE I'M WAITING!

I TAKE NOTE OF MY SURROUNDINGS, AND ALL AT ONCE IT APPEARS BEFORE ME THROUGH A CLUSTER OF ANCIENT WILLOWS... A STATELY OLD MANSION, WITH FINE, GRACEFUL COLUMNS AND IVY-HIDDEN WALLS, APPEARING AS A MIRAGE THROUGH THE SHIMMERING HUMID HAZE...

WELL! A BIT OF *GOOD* LUCK FOR A CHANGE! THE BOSS *TOLD* ME TO GET MATERIAL ON THESE OLD HOMES... MIGHT AS WELL START NOW! MIGHT GET A COLD DRINK ANYWAY!

WADING THRDUGH A MEADDW OF HIGH-GROWN WEEDS, THE AIR PUNGENT WITH HONEYSUCKLE AND JASMINE, I SOON FIND MYSELF IN THE PLEASANT SHADE OF THE BROAD VERANDA WAITING FOR AN ANSWER TO MY KNOCK, YET SENSING SOMEHOW THE PLACE IS DESERTED. . .



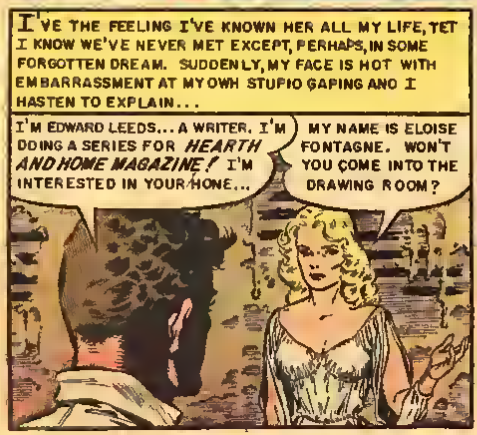
THERE NOT BEING ANY RESPONSE TO A SECOND KNOCK, I ENTER. A BITTER, ACRID SMELL RUSHES TO GREET ME... AND, AS SUNBLINDNESS LEAVES ME, I CAN SEE THE SURROUNDINGS. . .

THE IVY-COVERED OUTER WALL HAD WITHSTOOD THE FLAMES THAT ONCE GUTTED THE INTERIOR STUNNED WITH DISAPPDINTMENT, I STUDY THE CHARRED MOULDINGS AND GLIMPSE AN OCCASIONAL SPOT WHERE THEIR BEAUTY WAS SPARED. . .

TOO ABSORBED WITH EXAMINING THE RAVAGED HOME, I DON'T HEAR HER APPROACH. I WHIRL, STARTLED, AT THE FIRST SOUND OF HER SOFT, VELVETY VOICE...

THE DRAB UGLINESS OF MY WORLD, THE SCARRED CHAMBER IN WHICH I STAND, ALL ELSE BUT THE WARMLY SMILING VISION OF BEAUTY FRAMED IN THE DRAWING RODM DOORWAY HAVE VANISHED FROM MY MIND. SHE SPEAKS AGAIN..

I'VE THE FEELING I'VE KNOWN HER ALL MY LIFE, YET I KNOW WE'VE NEVER MET EXCEPT, PERHAPS, IN SOME FORGOTTEN DREAM. SUDDENLY, MY FACE IS HOT WITH EMBARRASSMENT AT MY OWN STUPID GAPING AND I HASTEN TO EXPLAIN...



THE DRAWING ROOM, TOO, BEARS GRIM REMINDERS OF RUIN, BUT YET IT IS NOT AS DAMAGED AS THE ENTRANCE HALL. WE SIT ON A SCORCHED SOFA BEFORE A LOW TABLE LADEN WITH FRUIT AND A DECANTER OF WINE. SHE FILLS A GOBLET AND HANDS IT TO ME. I DRINK THIRSTILY..

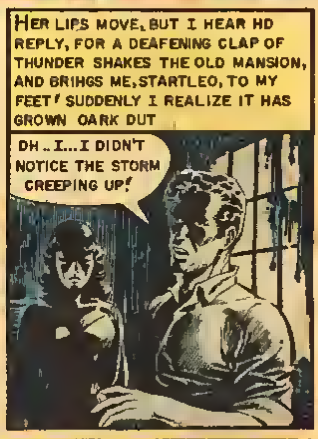
I POUR MYSELF ANDTHER GOBLET OF WINE ANO DRINK IT OOWH WHILE SHE TELLS ME THE HISTORY OF THE MANSIDN. I LISTEN, WATCHING THE MOVEMENTS OF HER LIPS, HAROLY DARING TO TAKE MY EYES FROM HER LEST I MISS THE SMALLEST IOTA OF HER RAOIENT LOVELINESS. I AM FASCINATED... BEWITCHED. . .

PERHAPS I'VE OOWNED THE WINE TOO DUICKLY, FOR NOW MY HEAD BEGINS TO SWIM. I HAVE TROUBLE CONCENTRATIHG DH HER WDRDS . THEY COME TD MY EARS AS THRDUGH A VEIL. .

IN SPITE OF MY DIZZNESS I SOMEHOW SENSE THAT IT TRDUBLES HER TO SPEAK OF THE FIRE. MY HEART GOES OUT TO HER IN SYMPATHY. . .

IS IT THE WINE ALONE THAT HAS MADE ME THIS WAY, OR AM I HYPNOTIZED BY HER BEAUTY, SO THAT I HAROLY KNOW WHAT I AM SAYING. .

HER LIPS MOVE, BUT I HEAR HD REPLY, FOR A DEAFENING CLAP OF THUNDER SHAKES THE OLD MANSION, AND BRIHGS ME, STARTLED, TO MY FEET! SUDDENLY I REALIZE IT HAS GROWN OARK DUT



THE THUHDER SPEAKS IN A LDW ROLLING RUMBLE. I TRY TO CLEAR MY HEAD, TO UNDERSTANO WHAT IT'S TRYING TO TELL ME. THEN I SEE ELOISE BEFORE ME. SHE'S HOLDIHG A LIGHTED CAHDLE, ANO ITS STEADY GLOW REFLECTS IN HER VIOLENT EYES. SHE BECKONS TO ME TO FOLLOW HER . . .

SHE LEADS ME UP THE BACK STAIRWAY TO THE THIRD FLOOR. HERE THE HALLWAY IS COMPLETELY CHARRED, SO THAT THE BLACKENED WALLS ABSORB THE CAHDLELIGHT. ELOISE HDDS TO A CLOSED DOOR.

YOU MIGHT FIHD THAT ROOM INTERESTING, MR. LEEOS. MY SISTER AND I USED TO PLAY IN THERE. GO IN. . .

THE ROOM THAT WAS ONCE THERE HAD BEEN BURNED AWAY IN THE INFERNO, AND ONLY A VIVID LIGHTNING FLASH KEEPS ME FROM PLUNGING TO THE ROOM FAR BELOW. I GRAB BLINDLY FOR THE DOORFRAME...

DESPERATELY I CLAW BACK TO SAFETY...

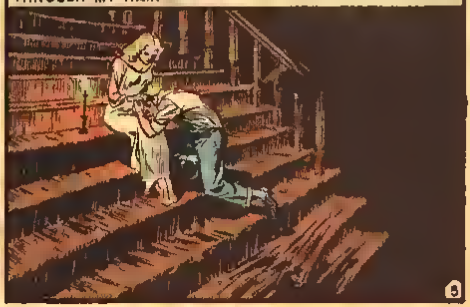
WE START DOWN THE MAIN STAIRWAY, SHE CLINGING TO THE RAILING, I STAYING AT THE CENTER OF THE STEPS FOR FEAR THE RAILING WILL COLLAPSE..

BEFORE HER WARNING CAN SEEP THROUGH TO MY MUDDLED MIND, A STEP TURNS TO ASHES BENEATH MY WEIGHT...

BY REFLEX ALONE I SNATCH AT THE RAIL! I HANG ON AND THEN PULL MYSELF UP, SUCKING IN DEEP BREATHS AND TREMBLING AT MY NARROW ESCAPE

I STARE DUMBLY INTO THE FATHOMLESS, BEWITCHING EYES AND TRY TO SOLVE THE MESSAGE THERE. THERE IS A MESSAGE, I KNOW, BUT WHETHER OR NOT IT IS ONLY A SYMBOL OF MY OWN CHAOTIC EMOTIONS, I CANNOT TELL. I TRY, THROUGH THE MIST CLOUDING MY MIND, TO RATIONALIZE...TO *THINK!*

BUT SOMEHOW I *CAN'T* THINK! I CAN ONLY SENSE A LONGING FOR THIS WOMAN...A DESIRE SO STRONG THAT EVEN THE TINGLING SENSATION OF FEAR I FEEL IS OVERCOME AND FORGOTTEN. I BURY MY HEAD IN HER LAP, HER HANDS CARRESS MY HEAD, HER FINGERS TRICKLE THROUGH MY HAIR...



HOW LONG WE STAY THERE, I DON'T KNOW, BUT SUDDENLY WE ARE IN THE DRAWING ROOM ONCE MORE AND SHE OPENS WIDE THE DOORS TO THE OUTSIDE. THROUGH THE DOWNPOUR I CAN SEE THE MURKY BLACK WATERS OF A SWAMP, AND THE VAGUE APPREHENSION THAT HAS BEEN GNAWING AT ME NOW TURNS TO STARK FEAR! HER HAND PRESSES ON MY BACK, URGING ME ON...

THE SWAMP IS FASCINATING IN THE RAIN, EDWARD... DON'T BE AFRAID!

...ELOISE... ELOISE...

A RAIN-COOLED GUST OF WIND CLEARS MY HEAD SOMEWHAT, AND I STOP, BEWILDERED, CONFUSED, FRIGHTENED..

I'M *AFRAID!* NOT LONG AGO I'D HAVE TAKEN ANY RISK! IT DIDN'T MATTER WHETHER I LIVED OR DIED! IT DIDN'T MATTER TILL I MET *YOU*, ELOISE! NOW I WANT TO LIVE SO I CAN BE WITH YOU! I WANT TO *STAY* WITH YOU... ALWAYS!

OH, EDWARD, EDWARD! I TOO, WANT YOU TO STAY! HOW I'VE LONGED FOR SOMEONE...

I LOOK DEEP INTO HER FASCINATING EYES AND MY FEAR LESSENS. THE WORLD ABOUT ME DISSOLVES INTO THE VAPORS OF NOTHINGNESS...

...ELOISE..

THERE'S TIME, EDWARD, AND THERE'S MUCH TO TELL! COME... I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU!

SEE, EDWARD? THERE, ON THE WALL! MY GREAT GRANDFATHER'S MUSKET! TAKE IT DOWN... LOOK AT IT! GO AHEAD...

I TAKE THE OLD GUN FROM THE WALL AND EXAMINE IT... THE STOCK, THE HAMMER, THE BARREL... EVEN THE MUZZLE...

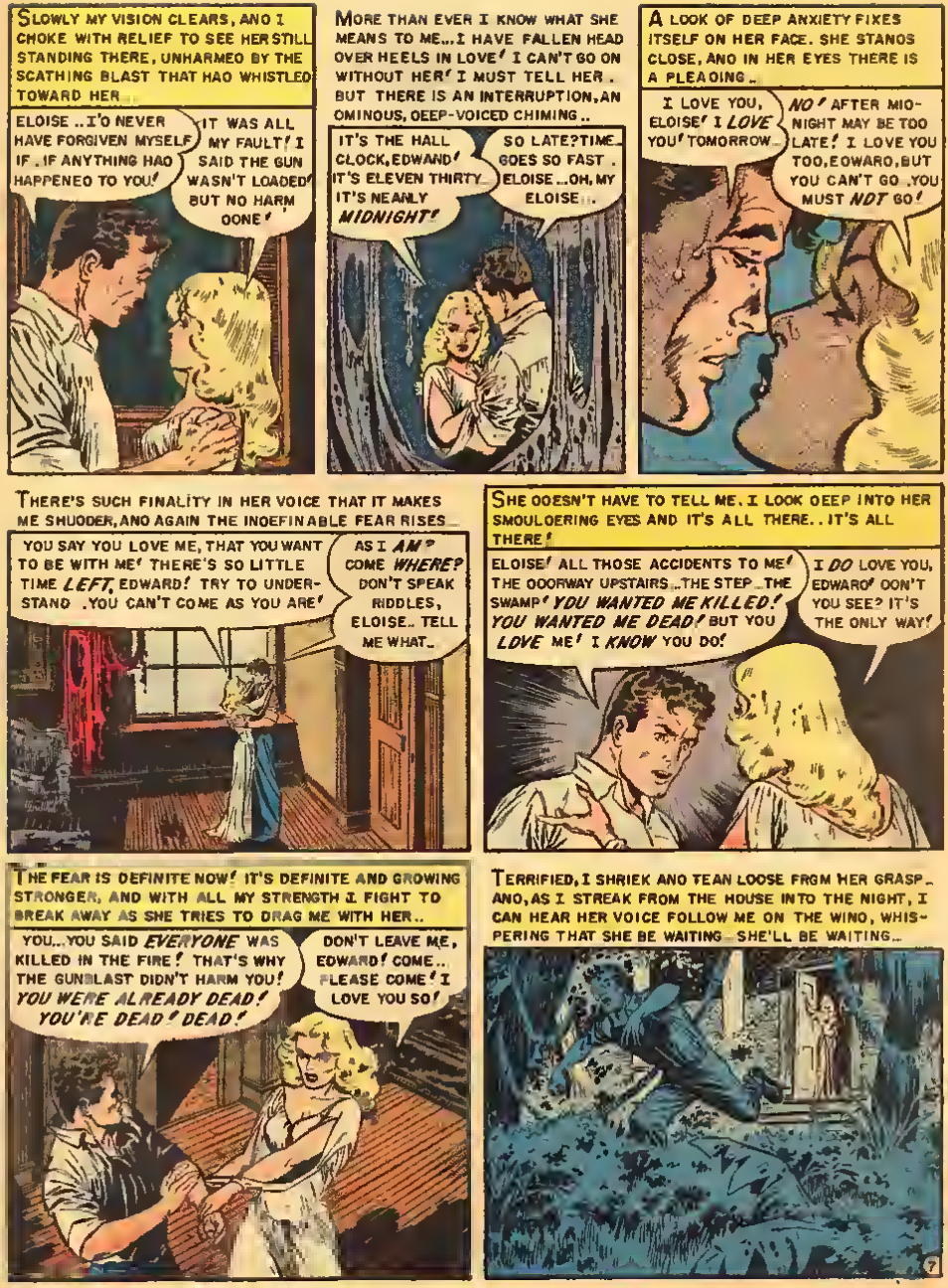
...ELOISE... IS IT LOADED?

LOADED? OF COURSE NOT, EDWARD! IT'S BEEN ON THAT WALL FOR MORE THAN SIXTY YEARS!

I TASTE THE WINE IN MY MOUTH.. THE HEAVY, SWEET NECTAR THAT HAS MADE MY HEAD SWIM. I CAN SMELL THE CLOYING FRAGRANCE OF HER, AND HER VOICE DRIFTS THROUGH SPACE TO MY EARS, COAXING ME TO FURTHER HANDLE THE GUN. MY EYES STARE DULLY INTO ITS BLACK MOUTH. MY FINGERS SENSE AND FONDLE THE TRIGGER...

SOMEHOW THE GUN IS TURNED IN MY HAND, MY FINGER STILL TOYING WITH THE TRIGGER. THERE IS AN EAR-SPLITTING EXPLOSION, A BLINDING FLASH..

BLAM!


SLOWLY MY VISION CLEARS, AND I CHOKE WITH RELIEF TO SEE HER STILL STANDING THERE, UNHARMED BY THE SCATHING BLAST THAT HAD WHISTLED TOWARD HER..
ELOISE ..I'D NEVER HAVE FORGIVEN MYSELF IF..IF ANYTHING HAD HAPPENED TO YOU!
IT WAS ALL MY FAULT! I SAID THE GUN WASN'T LOADED BUT NO HARM DONE!
MORE THAN EVER I KNOW WHAT SHE MEANS TO ME...I HAVE FALLEN HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE! I CAN'T GO ON WITHOUT HER! I MUST TELL HER. BUT THERE IS AN INTERRUPTION, AN OMINOUS, DEEP-VOICED CHIMING..
IT'S THE HALL CLOCK, EDWARD! IT'S ELEVEN THIRTY— IT'S NEARLY MIDNIGHT!
SO LATE? TIME GOES SO FAST. ELOISE...OH, MY ELOISE...
A LOOK OF DEEP ANXIETY FIXES ITSELF ON HER FACE. SHE STANDS CLOSE, AND IN HER EYES THERE IS A PLEADING..
I LOVE YOU, ELOISE! I LOVE YOU! TOMORROW..
NO! AFTER MIDNIGHT MAY BE TOO LATE! I LOVE YOU TOO, EDWARD, BUT YOU CAN'T GO..YOU MUST NOT GO!
THERE'S SUCH FINALITY IN HER VOICE THAT IT MAKES ME SHUDDER, AND AGAIN THE INDEFINABLE FEAR RISES..
YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME, THAT YOU WANT TO BE WITH ME! THERE'S SO LITTLE TIME LEFT, EDWARD! TRY TO UNDERSTAND..YOU CAN'T COME AS YOU ARE!
AS I AM? COME WHERE? DON'T SPEAK RIDDLES, ELOISE.. TELL ME WHAT..
SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO TELL ME. I LOOK DEEP INTO HER SMOULDERING EYES AND IT'S ALL THERE.. IT'S ALL THERE!
ELOISE! ALL THOSE ACCIDENTS TO ME! THE DOORWAY UPSTAIRS...THE STEP...THE SWAMP! YOU WANTED ME KILLED! YOU WANTED ME DEAD! BUT YOU LOVE ME! I KNOW YOU DO!
I DO LOVE YOU, EDWARD! DON'T YOU SEE? IT'S THE ONLY WAY!
THE FEAR IS DEFINITE NOW! IT'S DEFINITE AND GROWING STRONGER, AND WITH ALL MY STRENGTH I FIGHT TO BREAK AWAY AS SHE TRIES TO DRAG ME WITH HER..
YOU...YOU SAID EVERYONE WAS KILLED IN THE FIRE! THAT'S WHY THE GUNBLAST DIDN'T HARM YOU! YOU WERE ALREADY DEAD! YOU'RE DEAD! DEAD!
DON'T LEAVE ME, EDWARD! COME.. PLEASE COME! I LOVE YOU SO!
TERRIFIED, I SHRIEK AND TEAR LOOSE FROM HER GRASP.. AND, AS I STREAK FROM THE HOUSE INTO THE NIGHT, I CAN HEAR HER VOICE FOLLOW ME ON THE WIND, WHISPERING THAT SHE BE WAITING—SHE'LL BE WAITING...
7

STUMBLING, SLIPPING IN THE MUD, I MAKE MY WAY SOMEHOW TO MY CAR. I DRIVE TO A SMALL HOTEL MILES DISTANT, SMALL AND DRAB... BUT SAFE. IN MY ROOM I FLOP ON MY BED. I SLEEP.. AND DREAM..

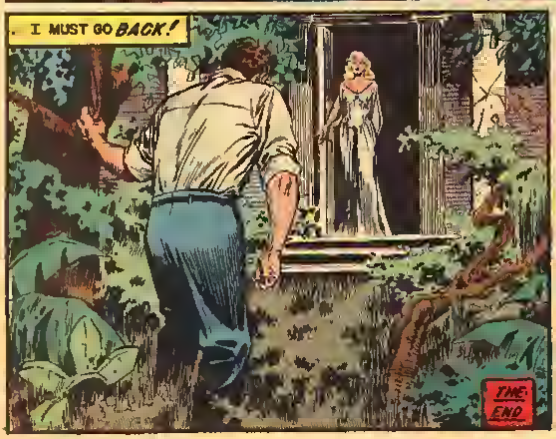
I WAKE UP, SEEING VISIONS OF HER IN THE ROOM SO REAL, I FEEL I COULD TOUCH THEM! SLEEP IS IMPOSSIBLE! SHE CROWDS INTO MY VERY MIND..

I PACE THE FLOOR NERVOUSLY, SENSING HER PERFUME IS WITH ME, SEEING HER WONDROUS BEAUTY THOUGH MY EYES ARE SHUT... KNOWING SHE IS CERTAIN *DEATH!*

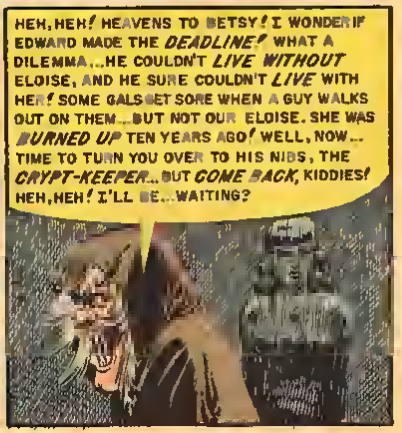
I TRY TO WRITE BUT THE PAGE IS BARREN. THE MAGNETISM OF HER UNBELIEVABLE BEAUTY IS ASTOUNDING! EVEN THE HORROR OF MY DESTINY WITH HER CANNOT DISPEL THE VIVID ILLUSIONS THAT SURROUND ME AT EVERY TURN...

MEMORIES OF HER ARE TOO STRONG! EVEN THE AROMAS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE DO NOT ERASE THE INDELIBLE SENSATIONS I KNOW BECAUSE OF HER. I CANNOT STAY. AS LONG AS I REMAIN, I WILL NEVER BE AT PEACE. I MUST LEAVE — I MUST GO!

...I MUST GO *BACK!*



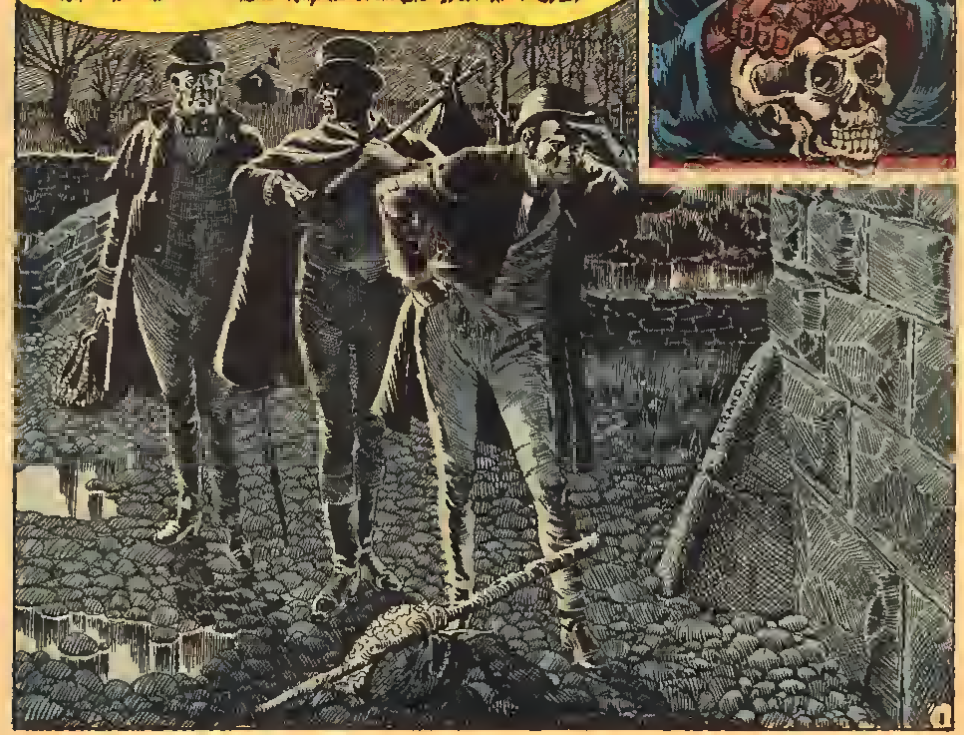
HEH, HEH! HEAVENS TO BETSY! I WONDER IF EDWARD MADE THE *DEADLINE!* WHAT A DILEMMA... HE COULDN'T *LIVE WITHOUT* ELOISE, AND HE SURE COULDN'T *LIVE* WITH HER! SOME GALS GET SORE WHEN A GUY WALKS OUT ON THEM... BUT NOT OUR ELOISE. SHE WAS *BURNED UP* TEN YEARS AGO! WELL, NOW... TIME TO TURN YOU OVER TO HIS NIBS, THE *CRYPT-KEEPER*... BUT *COME BACK*, KIDDIES! HEH, HEH! I'LL BE... WAITING?



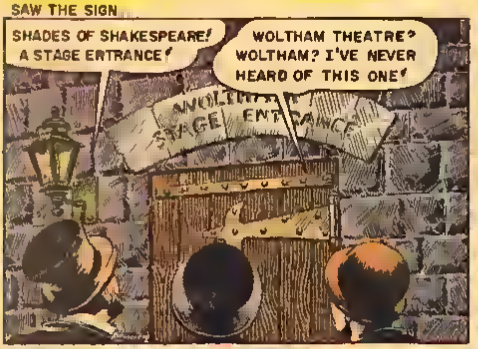
THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! SLOSH RIGHT DOWN THE SLOPPY AISLE, FELLOW FIENDS OF THE FOOTLIGHTS! PLENTY OF *GLOOM* UP FRONT—AND—CENTER HERE IN THE *CRYPT OF TERROR!* TODAY YOUR *CRYPT KEEPER* PRESENTS AN *ALL-SCAR GASP* IN A DOLEFULLY DELIRIOUS DRAMA ABOUT AN AMBITIOUS *ACTOR* WHO BECAME INVOLVED IN A GRUESOMELY *GRAVE* SITUATION, WHICH WAS TOPPED OFF IN *TRAGEDY!* SO NOW, PREPARE YOURSELF. AS THE GRIMY CURTAIN RISES ON *AX* ONE, *SCREAM* ONE OF THE CHILLER I CALL

TOP BILLING



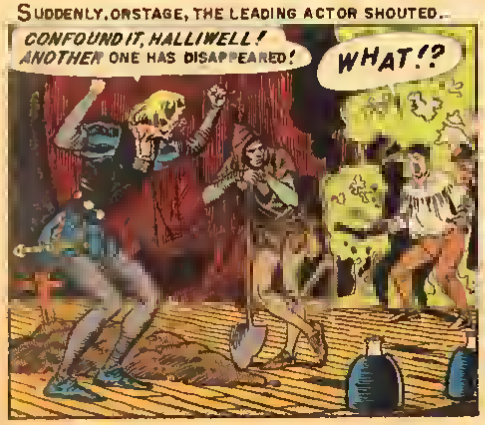
THE HEAVY VEIL OF MIST ROLLING OVER THE COUNTRY-SIDE NORTH OF DEVONSHIRE CLUNG TENACIOUSLY TO THE BACKS OF THE TIRED, HUNGRY TRIO OF ACTORS AS THEY CAME UPON THE DINGY FIELDSTONE BUILDING AND SAW THE SIGN...



HOPEFULLY, BARRY BLYE TRIED THE DOOR AND FOUND IT UNLOCKED. FROM WITHIN CAME THE FAINT DRONE OF VOICES, AND HE LOOKED TRIUMPHANTLY AT HIS FRIENDS...

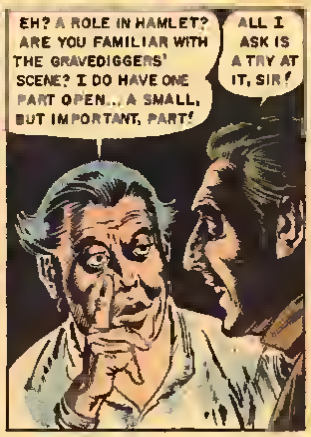
BLYE, NASH AND WINTON MOVED ON INTO THE THEATRE THAT REEKED OF DUST AND DECAY, AND HALLOWED WORDS FELL UPON THEIR EARS...

SUDDENLY, ONSTAGE, THE LEADING ACTOR SHOUTED...



THE ENRAGED ACTOR STORMED FROM THE STAGE AND JOINED THE GROUP IN THE WINGS...

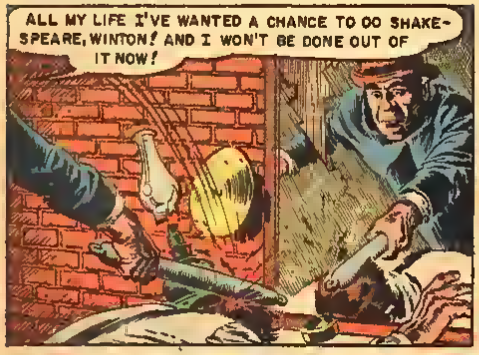
HALLIWELL, THE DIRECTOR, TURNED PURPLE WITH RAGE AND HE ROARED MERCILESSLY AT A GAUNT, DOUR-LOOKING YET INDIGNANT PROPERTY MAN.



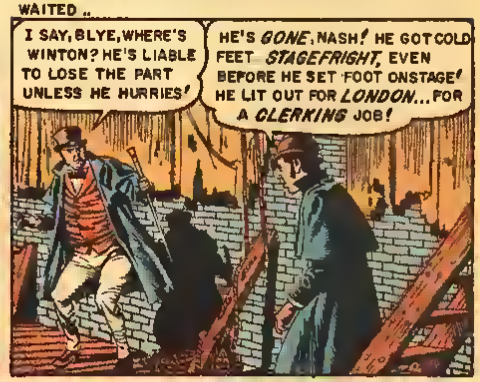
BARRY BLYE'S FACE DARKENED. WITHOUT HIS FRIEND NOTICING, HE STOOPED AND PICKED UP A HEAVY SASH-WEIGHT, AND HIDING IT FROM VIEW, HE STARTED AWAY...

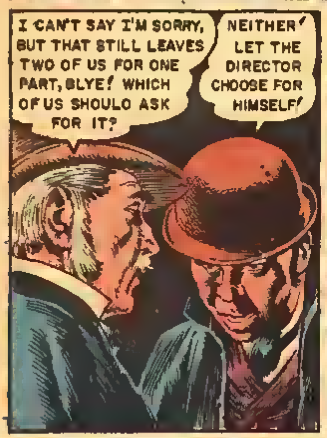
HE WAS BREATHING HEAVILY WHEN HE REACHED HIS FRIEND'S DRESSING ROOM, AND HE GRIPPED THE SASH-WEIGHT TIGHTLY, MURDEROUSLY AS HE ENTERED...

WINTON TURNED... TOO LATE! THE HEAVY BASHWEIGHT CAME DOWN WITH BONE-CRUSHING FORCE AND THE TERRIFIED SCREAM THAT STARTED FROM HIS THRDAT WAS NEVER FINISHED..



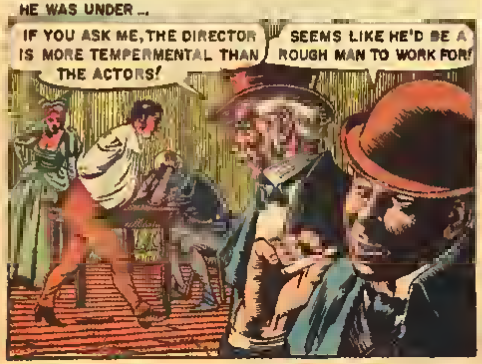
NO MORE THAN TEN MINUTES LATER, BARRY BLYE RETURNED BACKSTAGE WHERE HIS OTHER FRIERD, NASH, WAITED ..





THE TWO MER WATCHED DIRECTOR HALLIWELL WITH ANTICIPATION, BUT HE IGNORED THEM ..

HALLIWELL, THE DIRECTOR, STORMED AND PACED THE FLOOR IMPATIENTLY. BARRY BLYE LIT A CIGARETTE, NERVOUSLY IRHALED, TRYING TO RELAX FROM THE STRAIR HE WAS UNDER ..

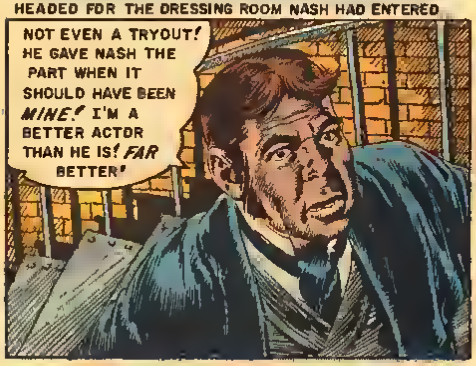


SUDDENLY THE DIRECTOR'S ANGER SUBSIDED AND, SMILING, HE APPROACHED NASH AND BLYE

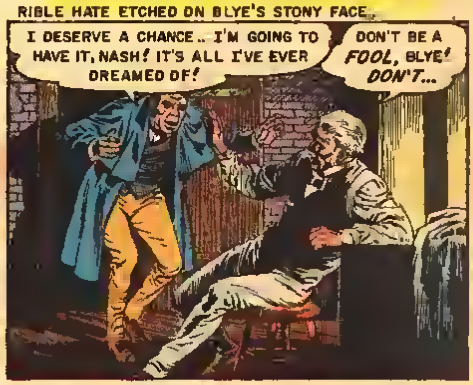
DESPERATELY, BLYE TRIED TO COLLAR THE DIRECTOR, WHO IGNORED HIM AND BRUSHED PAST HIM TO TALK TO NASH...

EDWARD NASH STARTED UP THE RUSTING IRON STAIRWAY, LOOKED BACK AND SMILED TAUNTINGLY AT BLYE WHOSE FACE HAD TURNED ASHEN IN RAGE

BLYE'S FACE CLOUDED, AND HIS DARK EYES FLASHED! SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY, HE MOUNTED THE CIRCULAR STAIRWAY, AND MUTTERING FIERCELY UNDER HIS BREATH, HEADED FOR THE DRESSING ROOM NASH HAD ENTERED



THE ROOM WAS DARK, BUT THERE WAS ENOUGH LIGHT FROM THE DRESSING TABLE FOR NASH TO SEE THE TERRIBLE HATE ETCHED ON BLYE'S STONY FACE...



THE MURDERER'S STRONG HANDS FLEW TO HIS FRIEND'S THROAT AND HE SQUEEZED WITH AN EFFORT THAT MADE EVERY MUSCLE, EVERY VEIN IN HIS BODY BULGE! NASH TURNED PURPLE AND A MOMENT LATER, WENT LIMP, HIS TONGUE, BLACK AND SWOLLEN, THRUST HORRIBLY FROM HIS MOUTH...

AFTER CONCEALING THE BODY, BARRY LEFT THE DRESSING ROOM, WIPING THE PERSPIRATION FROM HIS FACE. HIS HAND TREMBLED VIOLENTLY ON THE BANNISTER AS HE RETURNED AGAIN DOWNSTAIRS

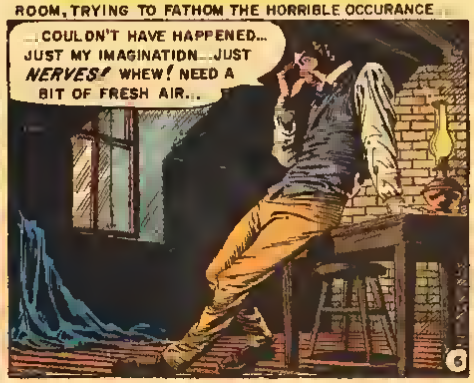
NERVOUSLY PUFFING ON A CIGARETTE STUB, HE HOVERED NEAR THE DIRECTOR WHO WAS BECOMING VERY IMPATIENT...

GLEEFULLY, HE RACED UPSTAIRS TO THE DRESSING ROOM. AS HE STEPPED INSIDE, HE SAW THE LITTLE OLD MAN...

BARRY BLYE LOOKED! SOMETHING IN THE PERSISTANT AND EXTREMELY AGITATED MANNER OF THE OLD MAN FORCED HIS EYES DOWNWARD TO EXAMINE THE SACK'S CONTENTS, THOUGH SOMEHOW, HE FEARED WHAT HE WOULD SEE...

HIS STOMACH CONVULSED INTO KNOTS! THE BLOOD ALL AT ONCE SLAMMED INTO HIS HEAD WITH SUCH FORCE THAT HE BECAME DIZZY, AND HE GROPED FOR SUPPORT, WHILE JUST OUTSIDE THE RIM OF HIS CONSCIOUSNESS HE HEARD THE OLD MAN'S FIENDISH CACKLE, SAW REPEATEDLY THE CONTENTS OF THE SACK... HUMAN HEADS!!

WHEN HIS DIZZYNESS PASSED HE SAW THAT HE WAS ALONE! SHAKILY, HE GLANCED AROUND THE SMALL ROOM, TRYING TO FATHOM THE HORRIBLE OCCURANCE...



HE STUMBLED RATHER WEAKLY TO THE WINDOW AND THREW ASIDE THE DIRTY CURTAIN COVERING IT..

...AHH-H...THAT FEELS BETTER! GUESS I'VE BEEN UNDER TOO MUCH STRAIN. HAVEN'T EATEN IN..IN...

HIS WORDS TRAILED OFF INTO A CONFUSED SILENCE, FOR HIS EYES FOR THE FIRST TIME HAD SEEN THE ENTRANCE TO THE BUILDING HE WAS IN...

WHA..? WHAT IN BLAZES?

ARE YOU READY, YOUNG MAN?

HUH? READY? READY FOR WHAT?

WHY, FOR THE PART IN HAMLET! WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!

OH..YES... THAT! JUST... JUST WHAT PART *IS* IT I'M TO PLAY?

WHY, THE SAME PART YOUR TWO FRIENDS WERE SUPPOSED TO PLAY!

YOU KNOW...WHERE I AS HAMLET, SAY, "ALAS, POOR YORICK." THAT'S WHERE I HOLD UP THE *SKULL!*

WE'VE BEEN HAVING SUCH DIFFICULTY WITH THAT PART! SOMEONE KEEPS *STEALING THE PROP!*

BUT WE WON'T LET *YOUR* SKULL DISAPPEAR 'CAUSE IT'S THE LAST ONE WE CAN GET! HEE, HEE, HEE!

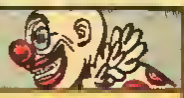
EEEYAAAAHHH!

WOLTHAM INSANE ASYLUM FOR ACTORS.

THE END

HEH, HEH! ALL OF WHICH BRINGS TO MIND ANOTHER LINE BY SHAKESPEARE: "PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW!" NOBODY WAS SORRIER THAN SWEET BARRY BLYE WHEN HE PARTED WITH HIS *HEAD!* OF COURSE, IT'S HIS OWN FAULT FOR BEING SO COMPLETELY ENTHRALLED WITH THE THEATRE! HE LOST HIS HEAD OVER IT, POOR CHAP! OH WELL, THE *VAULT-KEEPER* IS NEXT, READY WITH A YARN THAT WILL REALLY TICKLE YOU...TO *DEATH!* SO GOOD *BOO* FOR NOW!

SHOW STOPPER!



This carney, the man in the comic baggy pants thought to himself, was a set-up for a gee who was fast with his hands. In the crowd of rubes thronging the midway, a pickpocket had his choice of targets for a quick killing. As "Grendat the Clown," no one would suspect that jostling the customers was anything more than part of his act.

At the ticket booth in front of the ferris wheel, he spotted an old man counting the change of a ten-spot. Grendat slapped a nearby woman across the back with a chalk-filled sock and, while the gawkers howled appreciatively at his antics, sauntered slowly to the spot where the old man would soon exit from the ride.

In a few minutes the big wheel completed its circuit and Grendat saw his victim step from one of the cages. The old geezer shambled toward the long dark alley between the popcorn stand and the fortune teller's booth. Grendat sidled in the same direction, his eyes searching the crowd to make certain no one was watching him.

The scheme went wrong, right from the start. The old rube was suspicious of finding himself alone in the narrow alley with the ludicrously dressed clown... or Grendat's fingers performed without their customary agility. Whatever the reason, the old man began to yell as soon as Grendat had lunged against him. The clown snarled, slid his switch-blade knife from his pocket and hurled the old man backwards. Grendat slashed outward, again and again. In another moment it was all over: Grendat fled toward the crowded midway. He looked back just once at the sprawled body of the old man... the blood was still gushing from the jagged hole torn in the dead man's throat.

Slipping in among the hayseeds, Grendat moved quickly toward the flying-ring concession... a plan already taking shape in his mind. *They'll be sure to find the body soon,* Grendat thought. *I gotta make sure there are a lot of witnesses to testify I was hamming it up at the time of the killing. Gotta attract attention with a real eye-catching stunt. A sensational show-stopper!*

Grabbing hold of a flying-ring, Grendat waved gaily to the crowd as the big platform began to accelerate. The crowd chuckled as the clown swung his legs up over his head and slipped his feet into the metal circles. Balancing himself by the pressure of his insteps against the rings, Grendat let his hands slide free . . . and smirked to the delighted onlookers as he hung upside-down.

The platform whirled faster and the rings whipped outwards so that they were almost horizontal. Grendat groped to pull himself back into a normal position, aware of the brick wall coming ever-closer to his head as he hurtled around the speeding circle . . . aware that one more burst of speed and he'd never be able to slide out of his perilous predicament.

The shock of hitting the wall was an anticlimax: Grendat was already moaning with fear when his head slammed into the bricks. There was a blinding jar . . . a momentary realization of horrible disaster. Grendat felt blood pouring over his staring eyes . . . felt the bones of his skull shattering . . . felt his breath choked off in a spasm of raw agony. His mutilated body flopped from the rings a moment later.

Most of the chattering onlookers said the act was "terrif!" A *real show-stopper!*

E.C. WENT TO SEA

IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER NEW TREND...

AND WE CAME UP WITH...

SAGAS OF THE SEA, SHIPS, PLUNDER AND...

PIRACY

NOW YOU SEARCH FOR IT!

BUT IF YOU *CAN'T FIND PIRACY*. AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND, YOU CAN *SUBSCRIBE!* JUST FILL OUT THE COUPON AND MAIL, TOGETHER WITH *ONE HUNDRED PIECES OF CENT* (THAT'S ONE BUCK, LANDLUBBERS!), TO:

THE SEASICK EDITORS OF
PIRACY
ROOM 706
225 LAFAYETTE STREET
N.Y.C. 12, N.Y.

OKAY, BILGE RATS! YOU SHANGHAIED ME! I ENCLOSE $1.00 FOR THE NEXT EIGHT ISSUES OF *PIRACY!*

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZONE NO. ____

VAULT-KEEPER'S CORNER

Heh, heh! Well, I have a tasty bit of information that may come as a surprise to some of you gloops who continually write in addressing your host as "Old Hag, "Ugly Old Crone," etc. Fact of the matter is that your truly is most definitely NEITHER a Hag NOR a Crone, nor any other horrible FEMININE being you might care to suggest! At the risk of destroying the love life of a great number of readers who send amorous communications, and with due regard to the many others who have heretofore been under this ghastly misapprehension, I wish to have it known that your VAULT-KEEPER is a MAN!!

This may come as a shock in view of the fact that your storyteller has recently acquired a beauteous FEMALE companion, (Drusilla!—Ed.) but having advanced knowledge of things to take place in FUTURE issues of the Vault, the making known of the above information to one and all might very well be considered imperative . . . especially in SOME circles!

(All right, V.K., that's enough. You're not on the witness stand! Let's have some Perverted Poetry, eh! —Ed.)

Okay, Okay! Here's a delicious recipe to start the ball rolling. It's from Mrs. R. Klinder of Chicago, Ill., and it's called "Ghoul's Goulash":

First dissect a mouldy ghoul
And place the contents in a bowl.
Then add a spoon or two of glue
And mix it in a cruddy shoe
A shriveled ear, a stringy vein,
A punch of salt and a bloody brain.
Then alternately add more blood,
From a vampire's grave, a blob of mud.
A little spice, a rotted leg,
A punch of hair and one spoiled egg.
This highly refined gourmet's delight,
You'll enjoy every moment till the very last bite

Here's another morbid mess of moldy, mucky mush submitted by Sheldon Hack, Detroit, Mich.:

Miss Feeble was a teacher,
She also was a ghoul.
Four and twenty children
Will not return from school.
She ate a boy for breakfast,
A girl, she gnawed at night,
And when the people caught her
She put up quite a fight.
She ripped out one man's eyeball
And killed another dead.
She might have even won the fight
Except they split her head

Now for a limerick from Jim Seff in Baltimore, Md.

There was a young man, he was nice
A horrible shrew was his wife.
She laughingly said,
"What a shame to be dead"
While her knife was extracting his life!

Well, that's enough poetry. The following tune titles for our HORROR HIT PARADE were sent in by Don Donaldson of Sylvania, Ohio, Robert Versandi of New York City, John Speight of Yonkers, N. Y.; Judy Louther of Johnstown, Pa., Richard Fragola of Southington, Conn., Betty Farkas of Detroit, Mich.; and Bonnie Brady of Thomaston, Conn.:

THAT OLD BLACK CASKET
FROM THE SLIME CAME THE APE
MY HEART'S FRIED FOR YOU
YOU SAW ME CHOPPED UP IN THE SCRAPPLE
KNOCK A FRIED BABY OFF A TREE TOP
A VAMPIRE, A VAMPIRE, (OH, WHAT CAN IT BE?)
SHE WAS FRIED BUT HE WAS TENDER

And now for as many letters as space will permit . . .

Dear Vault-Keeper,
How come every time someone gets killed, they return and kill the person who killed him?
Joanne Schmidt
Levittown, L. I.

Well, that's all the letters space will permit!

I trust no one noticed that the CRYPT-KEEPER has been given *another magazine*. Personally, I refuse to comment on it. If you want the info, it's all on the inside front cover . . . but those idiot editors are gonna hear more about this. Wait'll O.W. hears! Imagine . . . TWO MAGS! OOOOOOoooooo, that dirty old thing!

Commercials: I refuse to give any commercials this issue. I won't tell you how much subscriptions to THE VAULT OF HORROR cost, and I definitely recommend that you do not order one! But the address for fan-mail is:

THE VAULT KEEPER
Room 706, Dept. 39
225 Lafayette St.
N. Y. C. 12, N. Y.

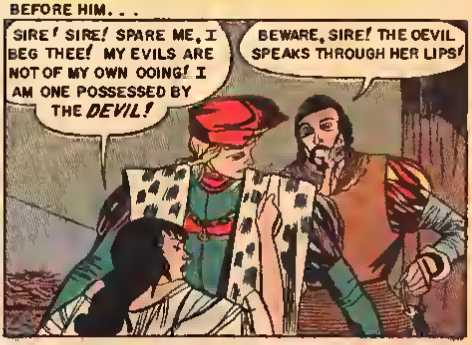
AH! FIRE AND BRIMSTONE! A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS... AND THE KING WHO ATTEMPTS TO AID HER BY MAKING HER ENDURE...

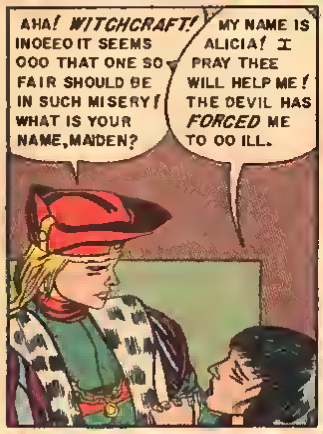
The PURGE

HEAVY BOOTSTEPS ECHOED HOLLOWLY THROUGH THE DANK, SMELLY ATMOSPHERE AS KING HORACE IX FOLLOWED HIS CAPTAIN OF THE CASTLE GUARD DOWN THE WINDING STONE STAIRWELL THAT LED TO THE DUNGEONS BELOW., THEIR DANCING SHADOWS LEAPED GROTESQUELY ABOUT THE WALLS AND CEILING, HIDING FROM THE FLICKERING LIGHT OF THE TORCH...

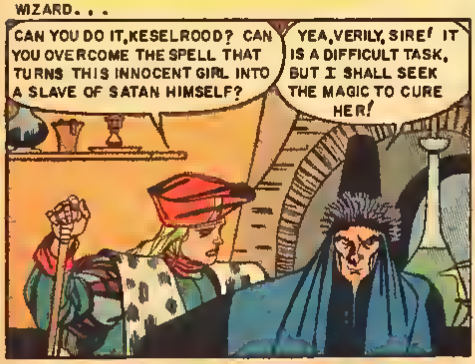
THE SCURRYINGS OF HUGE, MALODOROUS RATS CARRIED THE MELODY TO THE RHYTHMIC STEPS OF THE MEN'S FEET AS THEY PASSED ROWS OF FETID CELLS, OBLIVIOUS TO THE OPPRESSIVE STENCH. THE KING WAITED IMPATIENTLY WHILE SIR BENJAMIN FUMBLED THE KEY INTO THE LOCK...

THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN ON CREAKY HINGES AND THE BLAZING TORCH ILLUMINATED THE PITIFUL FIGURE OF A YOUNG WOMAN STANDING IN THE CENTER OF THE FILTHY CELL. ON SIGHT OF HER KING, SHE FELL TO HER KNEES BEFORE HIM...





KING HORACE LEFT THE DUNGEONS, CLIMBED NUMBERLESS STEPS THAT LED HIM TO THE UPPERMOST REACHES OF THE CASTLE, AND INVADED THE SECLUSION OF HIS WIZARD. . .



AND SO THE LOVELY ALICIA WAS BROUGHT TO THE LABORATORY OF THE WIZARD WHERE SHE UNDERWENT THE INTENSELY PAINFUL MEASURES TO WHICH HE SUBJECTED HER. SHE LAY WRITHING UNDER THE DOZENS OF NEEDLES THAT CARRIED A BURNING MIXTURE OF HERBS AND OINTMENTS INTO HER. . .

AND AT THE WEEK'S END, KING HORACE SPOKE ANXIOUSLY TO KESELROOD. . .

VISIBLY SHAKEN, KESELROOD THE WIZARD LED KING HORACE TO A SMALL CHAMBER WHERE ALICIA LAY WEAK AND CRYING ON A STRAW COT. TENDERLY, THE KING BENT NEAR HER. . .

MOST BEAUTEOUS ALICIA, TOU MUST CORTINUE! TOU MUST BE PURGEO! I HAVE TAKER A MOST PERSONAL INTEREST IN TOUR CASE! OO ROT ALLOW TOUR COURAGE TO OEGERT YOU! I BEG THEE!
FOR WHAT GOOO TO CONTINUE, SIRE? I DIE A THOUSANO-FOLO NOW! I WANT TO BE PURE, BUT I AM FAST LOSING STRERGTH!
FORSOOTH, THOU ART THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER IN MY KINGOOM! I VOW THAT WHEN YOU ARE RIO OF THIS ILL, I'LL TAKE TOU IRTO MY COURT!
YOU OO ME GREAT HOHOR, SIRE! FOR YOU WILL I TRT AGAIN! ARO WHER IT IS OVER, I SHALL GIVE YOU ALL MT SERVICES!
TRULT, ALICIA, THOU ART MOST WONOERFUL...
THANK TOU, SIRE!
AWHILE LATER KING NORAOE LEFT THE CHANGER ANO STEPPEO IRTO A CORRIDOR WHERE KESELROOO WAITEO
I TRUST ALL WENT WELL, EXCELLENCY!
ALL IS WELL... TO THIS MOMENT! REMEMGER, KESEL-ROOD... TOU HAVE SEVEN OATS!
AGAIN THE WIZARO SOUGHT THE MAGIC TO CURE ALICIA AGAIN SHE WAS PUT THROUSH HORRIFTING MEASURES. AGAIN THE SEVEN DAYS PASSED.
WELL, KESELROOO! HAVE YOU REACHEO SUCCESS?
SIRE.. I BEG TO EXPLAIN! AS TET I HAVE NOT!
YOU HAVE FAILED?! DO YOU NOT REMEMBER THE PUNISHMENT FOR FAILURE?!
YEA, YOUR MAJESTY! BUT I IMPLORE YOU NOT TO BE HASTY! SUCCESS IS ALMOST WITHIN OUR GRASP! I HAVE DISCOV-ERED THE METHOO TO ELIMINATE THE OEVIL!
THEN WHY HAVE TOU ROT PUT THIS METHOO TO USE? WHT IS IT TOU WAIT?
THE GIRL, SIRE! SHE IS RELUCTAHT! THE OEVIL WITHIN HER KNOWS HE WILL GE OESTROTEO SO HE HAS FORCEO THE GIRL TO BE AFRAIO! IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT!

I NEED BUT A FEW DAYS MORE! BUT HER WILL MUST BE STRENGTHENED SOMEHOW!

AH! THEN I SHALL SPEAK TO HER! WE MUST NEVER SURRENDER WHEN OUR GOAL IS SO CLOSE!

AGAIN, AS BEFORE, THE KING EXHORTED ALICIA TO RENEW HER FIGHT

BUT THE *PAIN*, SIRE! I GROW WEAK FROM THE PAIN

COURAGE, MY CHILD! SOON IT SHALL BE DONE WITH. AND THOU WILT BE MINE!

AND AGAIN AS BEFORE, THE WIZARD DID HIS MAGIC TO SUBDUE THE DEVIL.

AND AT LAST, IN GREAT JOY, KESELROOD PRESENTED HIMSELF TO THE KING.

SUCCESS, YOUR HIGHNESS! THIS VERY DAY, DID I, IN MY MIGHT, VANQUISH THE MAD SATAN FROM THE FAIR ONE! IN TRUTH, IT WAS A SIGHT TO BEHOLD!

AH? EXCELLENT GREAT WIZARD! THOU MUST TELL ME HOW IT CAME TO PASS!

IT WAS A FANTASTIC BATTLE, SIRE! AFTER THE BEATINGS AND THE BURNINGS THE DEVIL AT LAST RELINQUISHED HIS HOLD ON THE GIRL AND FLED IN A HUGE MASS OF BLACK SMOKE

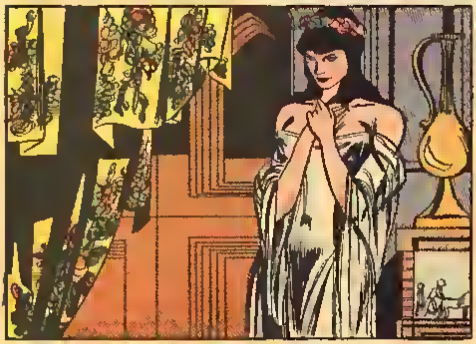
YOU SHALL BE WELL REWARDED, WIZARD! NOW, BRING THE GIRL TO ME! I GROW IMPATIENT!

FORSOOTH, IT GRIEVES ME TO SAY THIS, EXCELLENCY — BUT THE GIRL IS RESTING! IT WAS A TIRING ORDEAL! SHE WILL BE WELL SOON!

OF COURSE! I CARE WELL UNDERSTAND! MY HEART GOES OUT TO HER! BRING HER TO ME WHEN SHE IS WELL!

SEVERAL DAYS PASSED BEFORE ALICIA RECOVERED FROM THE TORMENTS OF THE PURGE, BUT AT LAST SHE WAS DRESSED IN THE SHEEREST OF GOSSAMER VEILS, SPRAYED WITH EXOTICALLY-SCENTED HERB ESSENCES, AND ANNOITED WITH THE FINEST OF OILS..

THE ELDEST LADY-IN-WAITING USHERED ALICIA INTO THE KING'S SUMPTUOUS CHAMBER, THEN WITHDREW. WITH FAST-BEATING HEART, ALICIA HEARD THE HUGE DOORS BEHIND HER BEING LOCKED TO INSURE THEIR PRIVACY...



SHE LISTENED ATTENTIVELY AS THE FOOTSTEPS IN THE HALL FADED INTO SILENCE. HER EYES SEARCHED EVERY NOOK EXAMINING THE LUXURIES THAT WOULD BE HERS. VISIONS OF HER FUTURE HAPPINESS FILLED HER MIND. .

ALICIA'S HEART SANK MOMENTARILY, FOR THE KING HAD NOT EVEN TURNED TO GREET HER. RATHER HE STOOD LOOKING FROM A WINDOW. NOW, AS ALICIA KNEW NEAR, HE SUDDENLY SPOKE...

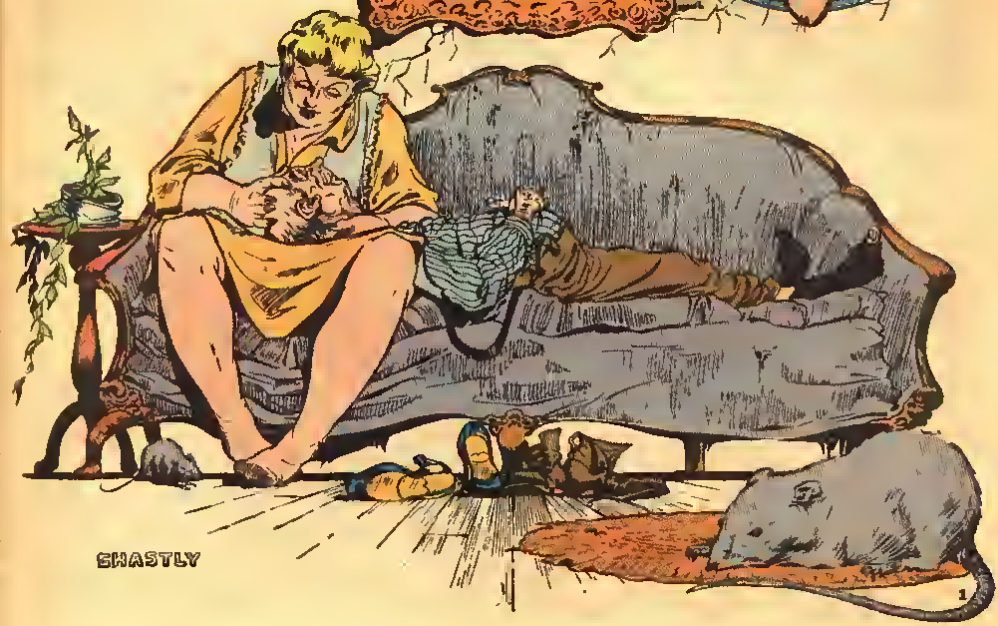
AS HE SPOKE, HE TURNED, AND ALICIA CRINGED WITH OVERWHELMING HORROR, FOR SHE SAW BY THE KING'S HAIRY FACE, HIS TALONLIKE CLAWS, AND HIS GREAT, GNASHING TEETH, THAT THIS CREATURE WHO SPRANG AT HER WAS A LOATHSOME, STARVING *WEREWOLF!*...

HEH, HEH! HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT KING HORACE? HE HAD ALL THE MONEY A MAN COULD WANT, BUT WAS HE SATISFIED? *NOPE!* HE HAD TO *PUT THE BITE* ON POOR ALICIA! WHAT KILLS ME IS THAT HE *WAITED SO LONG* FOR THAT MEAL! GUESS HE DEVELOPED HIS PATIENCE BY EATING IN RESTAURANTS! HEH. ANYWAY, IT'S TIME TO LEAVE. THE *VAULT-KEEPER* IS JUST WAITING TO GET HIS CLAMMY HANDS ON YOU, SO SO LONG!

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! SO YOU DEVILISH DEMONS HAVE FINALLY ARRIVED AT MY *HACIENDA OF HORROR*, THE *HAUNT OF FEAR!* AND IT'S ABOUT *SLIME*, SLOBS! I'VE BEEN WEARING MYSELF TO A FRAZZLE, TRYING TO KEEP PACE WITH *C.K.* AND *V.K.*.. BUT THAT'S *O.K.!* THIS TIME I'VE STEWED UP A SIMPLY *SCRUMPTIOUS* SLEW OF SLOP IN MY CRUD-CRUSTED *CAULDRON!* MMMM... TAKE A WHIFF! *WRETCHED*, ISN'T IT? HOW THEN, PASS ME YOUR PLATTER AND I'LL LADLE OUT *YOUR* LOATHSOME PORTION OF THE STORY I CALL...

ALL FOR GNAWT



GHASTLY

MILLIE MUMFORD TOSSED HER WIDOW'S WEEDS INTO A CORNER OF THE UNCLEANED ROOM, AND FLOPPED HER BULKY FORM ON THE GRIMY BED, ON THE SAME BEFOULED SHEETS WHERE HER FOURTH HUSBAND HAD DRAWN HIS LAST BREATHS JUST TWO WEEKS BEFORE. PALE BLUE SMOKE SPIRALED UPWARD FROM THE BUTT DANGLING FROM HER LIPS AS SHE REACHED FOR THE BOTTLE ON THE CLUTTERED NIGHT TABLE.

MILLIE TOOK A DEEP SWIG OF SCOTCH. SHE HAD GONE TO CHARLIE'S LAWYER WEEPING BITTER TEARS, AND HAD LEFT SPITTING MAD..

SHE ROSE SUDDENLY, CROSSED TO THE DRESSING TABLE, CLEARED OFF AN ASSORTMENT OF COSMETICS WITH A SWEEP OF HER ARM AND STARED DOLEFULLY INTO THE MIRROR.

SHE RETURNED TO THE BED, PICKED UP FROM THE FLOOR A COPY OF "LONELY HEARTS AND OPPORTUNITIES."

SUDDENLY ANOTHER ITEM SEEMED TO LEAP OUT OF THE PAGE AT HER. MILLIE'S CRAFTY EYES AVIDLY SCANNED THE AD..

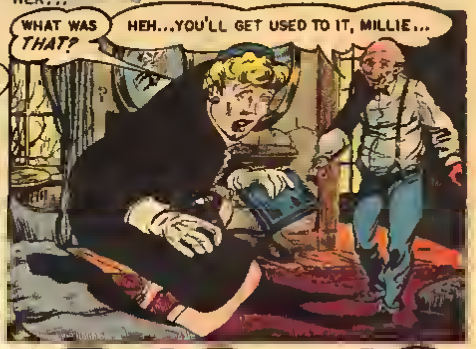
A HASTY CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWED, AT THE END OF WHICH MILLIE TRAVELLED A THOUSAND MILES BY TRAIN AND TAXI...

MILLIE CLAMBERED FROM THE CAB AND LAGGED ALONG A RUTTED PATH TOWARD A SAGGING, WEATHER-BEATEN HOUSE SQUATTING AMONG OVERGROWN WEEDS AND ANCIENT, GNARLED TREES...

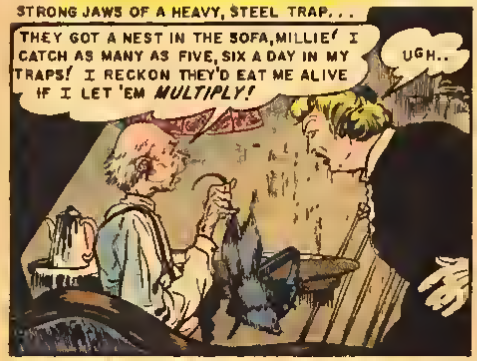
IN ANSWER TO HER POUNDING, THE DOOR RASPED SLOWLY OPEN. ALVIN TUTTLE SQUINTED THROUGH FADED GREY EYES, THEN SPOKE IN A SHAKY VOICE...

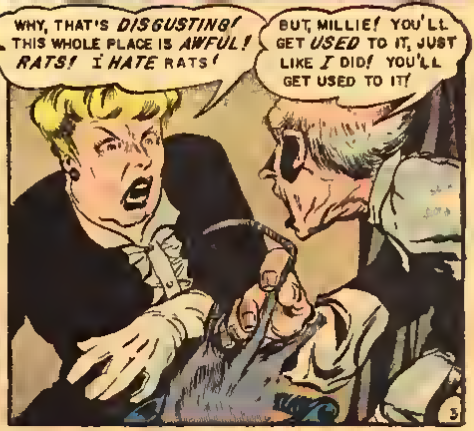
EVERYTHING ABOUT THE HOUSE, INCLUDING ALVIN TUTTLE HIMSELF, HAD AN AIR OF DECAY. AS MILLIE FOLLOWED THE DODDERING OLD MAN INTO THE PARLOR, SHE STUDIED WITH OBVIOUS DISDAIN THE PEELING WALLPAPER, THE FRAYED RUG AND FROWSY DRAPES. HE SMILED AT HER...

MILLIE HAD HARDLY SAT DOWN ON THE DUST-LADEN SOFA WHEN FROM UNDER IT CAME A LOUD *SNAP!* SHE JUMPED UP, STARTLED... AND OLD ALVIN STARTED TOWARD HER...



HE REACHED UNDER THE SOFA AND PULLED OUT AN ENORMOUS RAT, HOLDING IT UP BY THE TAIL FOR MILLIE TO SEE. ITS HEAD WAS ALL-BUT-SEVERED BY THE STRONG JAWS OF A HEAVY, STEEL TRAP...



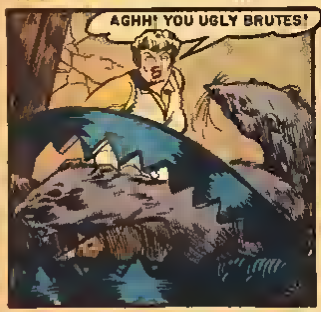


I DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULD MARRY YOU AND LIVE IN THIS FILTHY HOUSE! YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER!
WELL THEN, IF YOU COULDN'T LOVE ME ENOUGH TO SHARE WHAT I GOT, YOU CAN GO RIGHT NOW! I DON'T WANT YOU!
MILLIE HURRIED BACK TO THE WAITING CAB AND SLUMPED SULLENLY IN THE REAR SEAT.
TAKE ME BACK TO TOWN, DRIVER! LET ME OFF AT THE FIRST BAR YOU COME TO! I NEED A DRINK BAD!
SEVERAL DRINKS AT THE BAR IN TOWN FAILED TO BRIGHTEN HER SPIRITS, BUT IT HELPED LOOSEN HER TONGUE...
THE NERVE OF THE OLD COOT, INVITIN' A LADY TO WHAT HE CALLS A FINE OLD HOME WHICH TURNS OUT TO BE A RAT-INFESTED DIVE!
IF I HAD HALF OF THAT SCHEWBALL'S DOUGH, I'D LIVE IT UP BIG! I'D GET ME A BABE LIKE YOU AN'...
DOUGH? WHAT DOUGH?
FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND BUCKS THAT HE WITHDREW FROM THE BANK YEARS AGO! I KNOW, SWEETHEART... MY OLD MAN WAS THE TELLER THAT COUNTED IT OUT FOR HIM! HE'S STILL GOT IT ALL IN THAT JOINT OF HIS... THAT IS, IF THE RATS HAVEN'T EATEN IT!
MILLIE GASPED, TURNED PALE, FRANTICALLY GATHERED UP HER BELONGINGS AND HURRIED TOWARD THE DOOR..
HEY! WHERE YOU GOIN', HONEY?
I JUST FOUND OUT I'M IN LOVE, PAL!
LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER, MILLIE WAS BACK ON ALVIN TUTTLE'S WORM-EATEN DOORSTEP, WITH A PITIFUL THROB IN HER VOICE TO MATCH THE SORRY LOOK ON HER FACE..
I GUESS THE TRIP TIRED ME, ALVIN! CAN YOU FORGIVE ALL THE AWFUL THINGS I SAID?
OH, YOU WERE RIGHT, I GUESS, MILLIE, BUT IF YOU COULD LEARN TO CARE...
THAT WAS THE OPPORTUNITY SHE HAD BEEN HOPING FOR! LOVINGLY, SHE THREW HER STRONG ARMS ABOUT HIS FRAIL BODY AND PLANTED HER FULL, WET LIPS ON HIS...
DON'T YOU SEE, ALVIN, DARLING . THAT'S WHY I CAME BACK! I GOT TO THE STATION AND I MISSED YOU! I KNEW I'D FALLEN, ALVIN. . FALLEN HARD!

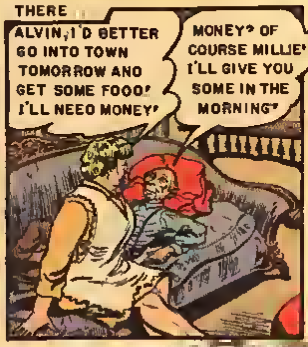
MILLIE MUMFORD BECAME MRS ALVIN TUTTLE THAT SAME WEEK. HOW HAPPY WERE THOSE DAYS FOR HIM AFTER DINNER MILLIE WOULD SIT ON THE SOFA, AND HE'D STRETCH OUT CONTENTEDLY WHILE SHE FONDLED HIS HEAD..

AND SOON ALVIN WOULD GO OFF INTO A DEEP SLEEP, AND MILLIE WOULD BE HAPPY, TOO, FOR SHE'D BE FREE TO HUNT FOR HIS HIDDEN FORTUNE.

BUT MILLIE HAD TO BE CAREFUL. THERE WERE ALWAYS THE RATS... GREAT FIERCE AND HUNGRY RATS! AND THE TRAPS WERE EVERYWHERE, WAITING WITH YAWNING STEEL JAWS TO SHUT ON UNWARY HANDS...

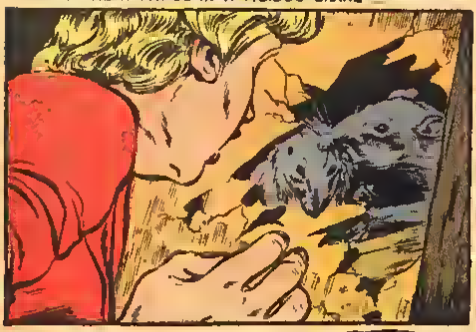


SHE WOULD HUNT FOR HOURS BUT FIND NOTHING. THEN SHE WOULD RETURN TO THE SOFA, AND WHEN ALVIN AWAKENED HE'D FIND HER THERE...



UNFORTUNATELY FOR MILLIE, HER PLAN WENT AWRY, FOR SHE AWOKE LATER THAT NIGHT AND FOUND ALVIN GONE FROM BED. BEFORE SHE COULD GO AFTER HIM, HOWEVER, HE RETURNED, SMILING, WITH SEVERAL TEN DOLLAR BILLS IN HIS HAND.

MILLIE'S HUNT CONTIRUED, BUT IT WASN'T EASY. THERE WERE THE RATS. SHE'D FIND A HOLE IR A WALL WHERE THE LATH AND PLASTER HAD FALLEN AWAY, AND THEY'D BE STARING AT HER WITH THEIR BEADY BLACK EYES BARING THEIR FANGS IN A VICIOUS SNARL

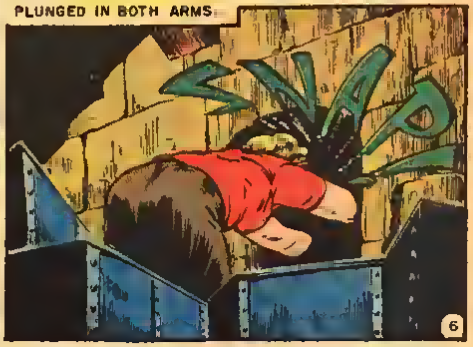


... AND TRAPS, EVERYWHERE! ONCE SHE LIFTED SOME LOOSE BOARDS FROM A BEDROOM FLOOR AND POKED A STICK DOWN

IN ANGER SHE STOMPED BACK TO THE SOFA WHERE ALVIN SLEPT, AND ROUGHLY ROUSED HIM.

THE CELLAR. MILLIE HAD NEVER BEEN IR THE CELLAR BEFORE. SHE HAD HEARD THE RATS DOWR THERE.. SO MARY OF THEM AND HAD BEEN AFRAID TO GO, BUT HER GREED WAS STRONGER THAN HER FEAR... AND SO SHE WENT DOWN

SHE REMOVED FOUR CHESTS FROM THE HOLLOWED WALL, STEEL CHESTS TO PROTECT THE MONEY IR THEM FROM THE SHARP-FANGED RATS. AND MILLIE COULD SEE A FIFTH CHEST DEEP IN THE HOLE. GREEDILY, SHE PLUNGED IN BOTH ARMS.



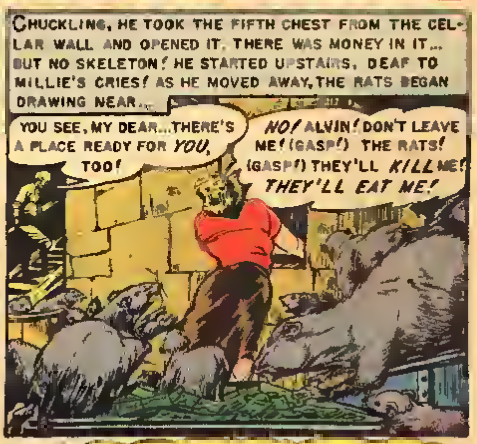
COLD SWEAT BROKE OUT ALL OVER MILLIE. HER THICK WRISTS WERE LOCKED FAST IN THE MIGHTY STEEL JAWS OF A TRAP THAT WAS CHAINED DOWN IN THE HOLE! THEN ALVIN WAS THERE... SMILING

ALVIN TUTTLE KEPT SMILING AT HIS WIFE AS HE MOVED CLOSER TO ONE OF THE CHESTS ON THE FLOOR...

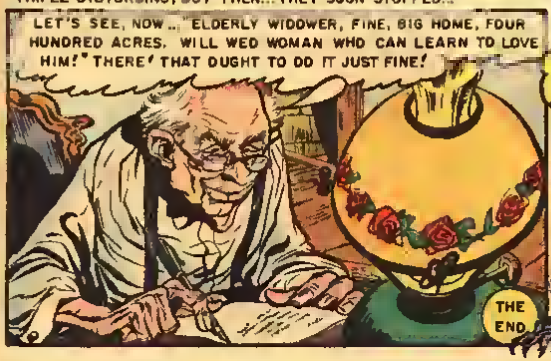
A WILD GLEAM LIT HIS EYES AS HE THREW OPEN THE LID OF THE STEEL CHEST! MILLIE STARED...NOT AT THE MONEY, BUT AT THE SKELETON LYING ATOP OF IT THAT GRINNED IDIOTICALLY UP AT HER...

RATS STOOD BACK, THEIR CRAFTY EYES GLITTERING EVILY, AS ALVIN OPENED HIS OTHER CHESTS. SUFFERING HOT FLASHES OF PAIN AND CHILLS OF HORROR, MILLIE WATCHED...

CHUCKLING, HE TOOK THE FIFTH CHEST FROM THE CELLAR WALL AND OPENED IT. THERE WAS MONEY IN IT... BUT NO SKELETON! HE STARTED UPSTAIRS, DEAF TO MILLIE'S CRIES! AS HE MOVED AWAY, THE RATS BEGAN DRAWING NEAR...



ALVIN TUTTLE SAT AT A TABLE IN THE PARLOR, A TENDER SMILE LIGHTING HIS FACE, AND HIS GNARLED HAND SHOOK AS HE LABORED OVER A LETTER. PERHAPS MILLIE'S SCREAMS OF AGONY WERE A TRIFLE DISTURBING, BUT THEN... THEY SOON STOPPED...



HEE, HEE! *PFOOEY!* WASN'T THAT *GNAWSEOUS?* BUT THAT'S THE WAY LIFE IS, I GUESS! MILLIE WAS A *HARD-BITTEN* GIRL AFTER THE RATS FINISHED WITH HER! ANYWAY, IF YOU'RE *STILL* HUNGRY, YOU'LL FIND A SURPRISE IN THE *GOOKY* JAR! HEE, HEE! ALL RIGHT, MY WITCHLINGS... I'LL HAVE THE OLD BOILER BUBBLING FOR YOU IN *C.K.'S* NEW MAG, *THE CRYPT OF TERROR*, SO TILL THEN I'LL SAY *BUY-BUY!*

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